

The revery alone will do, if bees are few

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The revery alone will do, if bees are few

by [middlemarch](#)

Summary

It wasn't an idle question, nor was it idly asked. Alina wanted to know what he would say. Whether he would tell the truth.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

“If all the Grisha in Ravka were safe, what would you do?” Alina asked. It was the kind of question she could only ask after they’d left the Little Palace, away from everything Aleksander had built for his Grisha; they were in a copse of birches, sitting on the grass and she’d plucked a long stem to stroke against her cheek. With her kefta unfastened, she could almost pretend she was in the meadow at Keramzin, at least until she glanced over and saw Aleksander and not Mal, his serious dark eyes instead of blue. Their horses were tied to one of the trees and nickered softly from time to time.

“There’s Fjerda and Shu-Han, they would still pose a grave threat,” Aleksander began.

“All right, if all the Grisha in the entire world were safe, what would you do?” she said.

“What would I do?” Had he ever been this puzzled before?

“With your life. If summoning shadows was not a threat anymore, what would you do? Who would you choose to be?” she asked. The Fabrikators would still make things and there would still be ships to sail for the Squallers but Alina had thought there no clear path for either of them, Summoning shadows or light to what purpose?

“That will never happen,” he said flatly. “You’re too young—”

“I didn’t say when,” she snapped. “I’m not too young to imagine another world, even if I don’t expect it to come to pass. You think I never wondered about being Grisha? About being the daughter of living parents, a sister, an aunt?”

“I beg your pardon,” he said and it sounded like he meant it, the begging and the pardon.

“You haven’t ever thought about it?” she said.

“No, I can’t say that I have. I was born into a family of powerful Grisha, there was no possibility that I would be anything but another such. Since I was a small boy, my abilities marked me out,” he said.

“I never thought growing up in Keramzin had any advantages, but maybe I was wrong,” Alina said. “There was no one to make me be anything other than another orphan. I had a chance to live another life.”

“You were malnourished, frail, always ill before you started summoning,” he said. “It would have killed you, to be other than you were born to be.”

“Not all at once,” she said. “And I learned other things, things the Grisha in the Little Palace never learned.”

“What did you learn then?” he asked.

“How to live with loneliness. How to watch when you are invisible. How to play Shatranj, how to win,” she said, ticking off the list with touches of the grass-blade to her cheek. Its cut end was sweet and the unconjured sun was warm on her face, on her hair. Aleksander was

quiet and she was struck by how beautiful he was, the shadows collected in his dark eyes, the line of his throat. They had been arguing and now they were not, a shift she had begun to recognize with him. He trusted her as he trusted no one else, hers a debt unique in his experience, her eyes capable of seeing what he missed.

“I would have been a gardener, a botanist,” he said. “I would have kept a hothouse and also an orchard. Peaches, cherries, stone fruit. I would have liked tending to the plants, knowing they would die, feeling the seasons in my hands. I like the sound of the bees and taste of honeycomb, I would have kept my own hives.”

“I would have studied the stars, I think. David has a device, a series of lens, and there are some equations I saw in a Kerch book in the library that have to do with the heavens,” Alina offered. “The sun is only one star, isn’t it? It would be nice to know more, to understand the working of something outside ourselves.”

“You would still be a light in the darkness,” he said. “You wouldn’t escape your nature.”

“I wouldn’t be reduced. A Sun Summoner, a saint,” she said. “Those aren’t people, they are figures.”

“You could be a queen,” he said. “Moya koroleva.”

“I’d rather be the beekeeper’s assistant. I like honey-cake,” she said and he reached over, took hold of the hand holding the blade of grass, his grasp like the Grisha wedding bracelet given to a bride.

“Then I would be a baker and bring you a piece when you forget to leave the observatory,” he said. “When your hands were covered in ink, I’d feed you the first bite.”

“And who’d eat the last?” she said. His gaze dropped to her parted lips and she felt the sun rising within her.

“There would never be a last bite. There would always have been more honey in the hives, zvyozdochka,” he said.

“Would we still live forever?” she asked.

“I imagine so. But we’d be content,” he said. Her mare neighed and Alina saw it all, the stables and the stone cottage, the tile stove and herbs hanging in bunches from the rafters, a little glass vase beside the bed with a fresh blossom every day, her armillary sphere in Grisha steel, Aleksander washing his hands free from earth, his kefta worn for warmth instead of protection, the front door painted iris-blue in welcome. The hand-carved cradle, the linen bonnet, the small dusty boots next to his. She blinked and it was all gone.

“We can’t be content, can we?” she said and he heard how she’d realized what he’d known for so long, the burdens of their power, well beyond any danger posed by any otkazat’sya.

“No, but we can be happy, Alina,” he said, pressing his palm against hers, closing his eyes against the brightness of the day. She let her power settle around her and heard him start to

hum a melody too old for her to name; he was right. They were happy.

End Notes

Title is from Emily Dickinson.

Armillary spheres are also called celestial globes and were early tools used for astronomy.

I'm sure you can look it up or guess from context, but zvyozdochka means "little star."

Works inspired by this one

[I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink \(but that I would not lose her sight so long\)](#) by [littleladybird](#)

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